



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Good Samaritan, George Frederic Watts, 1904



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### Oblatio Sui

*Lord, take all my freedom.  
Accept my memory,  
my understanding,  
And my entire will.  
You have given me all that I have or hold dear.  
I return it to you,  
that it may be governed by your will.  
Give me only your grace  
and the gift of loving you,  
And I will be rich enough;  
I will ask for nothing more.  
Amen.*

Catholic  
**Faith, Life  
& Creed**  
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Word worksheets  
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today's liturgy continues to take up our cross and follow Jesus.
- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## Reading 1: Deuteronomy 30:10-14

- ▶ Moses bids farewell in today's reading and exhorts the people to return to their intimate covenant relationship with God.
- ▶ The underlying principle of Deuteronomy is biblical justice rooted in love—*hesed*—love of God, neighbor, the poor, oppressed, widows and orphans.
- ▶ The Law was extremely important to the people of Israel. The Law was not simply a code of ethics or a list of arbitrary commands. The Law was at the heart of their faith in God.
- ▶ God gave Israel the Law as a means for the people of God to enter into covenant relationship. God entered into a covenant with the people at the creation of the world and then again at Sinai.
- ▶ When God created human beings God promised to provide for them. The people in return committed to love God, love one another as one's self and to care for those who were unable to care for themselves and to be good stewards of God's creation.
- ▶ Over time the people failed to live according to the covenant God forged with them. The people understood their captivity in Egypt and then again in Babylon as punishment for their failure to live the covenant.
- ▶ Following the amazing events of the Exodus the people wandered in the desert as a result of their lack of faith in God's promise to care for them and show them the way.
- ▶ Moses went up to Mount Sinai where he encountered God in the burning bush. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.
- ▶ The Law was understood as the people's way to respond to God's incredible love and providential care for them. The Law was not burdensome; it was the means by which the people of Israel reciprocated for their part in the covenant.
- ▶ God told the people in the first covenant he forged with them to love the Lord God with heart, soul and being, to love neighbor as self and to care for those who have no one to care for them.
- ▶ That law was called the Shema, which even today faithful Jews pray each day. "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength. Take to heart these words I enjoin on you today (Deut. 6:4-6).

- ▶ Faithful observance of the Law was the way in which the people could “love God with heart, soul and being”.
- ▶ Just as the word *church* has several meanings, a primary, integral meaning for *church* is the *people of God*. *Church* is also word that designates a gathering space for worship; but in the consciousness of the people the former has more importance than the latter. Similarly, the word *Law* had several meanings. *Law* did refer to the codified, written word; but it also meant so much more than that. *Law* was a reference to a relationship—the *Law* was considered a living entity—a living Word. The Law was the manifestation of God’s *Word* in the heart of each believer.
- ▶ God called for nothing less than faithful adherence to the Law in response to so great a gift.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What does the term Law of God mean to you?
- ▶ What is your response to the Law of God? How important do you think it is to follow God’s Law? If you do think it is important, why is it important?
- ▶ Why did God give us the Law by which to show our love for him? What is it about the Law that is good for us?
- ▶ In what way do you love the Lord God with your entire, heart, soul and being? What evidence is there in your life that you love the way God intends for us to love—that is love of God, love of neighbor and self and care for those who cannot care for themselves?
- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?

## Second Reading: Colossians 1: 15-20

- ▶ The Jewish leaders were bound and determined to get rid of their nemesis. They charged him with attempting to vandalize the Temple.
- ▶ Unable to convict him on that charge the Romans charged him with disturbing the peace and he was sentenced to three years in prison in Israel.
- ▶ As a Roman citizen he had the right to a Roman trial and was thus bound and chained and taken to Rome. This letter is written from his Roman cell as he awaited trial in about 62 AD.
- ▶ Paul’s letters were an attempt to correct the errors, inconsistencies and distortions of the Gospel that he experienced in his travels, not the least of which was the effects of Gnosticism. Gnostics believed the only pathway to God was through special knowledge. If people sinned it was due to ignorance. Secretly enlightened

people had special access to the divine and were thus able to be freed from the corporal world and live only in the spirit world.

- ▶ Gnostics believed that matter was evil and things of the spirit were good. Thus, since the body was matter, the body was evil. God could not enter an evil entity so angels were necessary to allow access to the divine.
- ▶ As a result of this thinking a hierarchical college of angels increased—Powers, Principalities, and Dominions. It was only through the college of angels that human beings were allowed access to God.
- ▶ Some devotees of gnosticism believed that Jesus was an angel-like intermediary and as such was neither human nor divine.
- ▶ Needless to say Paul was vehemently opposed to this aberrant philosophy and had already addressed it in his correspondence with the Corinthians and the Galatians. Now he tackles the same issue with the Colossians.
- ▶ Paul was incredulous that the people were worshipping angels and following a legalistic and literalist observance of the Law-- as if the Law could save. He passionately upheld principle Christian truth—the crucified and risen Christ--by extension his cross--is the only means of salvation; it is the only way to God.
- ▶ Today's reading is a hymn that praises Christ as God, the pre-existent Christ who was present at the creation of the world. Christ existed before *wisdom* existed. Christ is the divine Master of the Universe which he created and over which he exercises power and sovereignty.
- ▶ Through Jesus' death and resurrection access to heaven was granted to all who had already died and were awaiting access to eternal life/salvation and all who would die in the future.
- ▶ Jesus is the *Wisdom* of God, fulfilled most perfectly on the cross.
- ▶ The peace that was promised at the creation of the world was only possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus had to return to his rightful place in order to restore the harmony (peace and justice) that was intended for the human race.
- ▶ Jesus' earthly life taught us how to restore that harmony—through commitment to biblical justice—reciprocal love of God, neighbor, self and God's creation, especially those who could not care for themselves. God's love is to be extended to all of God's creation—ALL—even those very difficult to love.
- ▶ God's intention at the creation of the world was for human beings to live in perfect harmony with one another and with God's creation that was entrusted to them. Human beings however, exercised their God-given freedom and sinned, thus circumventing God's intention. Only Jesus, God's Son had the power to restore the harmony that was lost.
- ▶ The first Christians ascribed all the divine personifications given to the word *Wisdom* to Jesus Christ. Jesus was and is believed to be the personification of *wisdom* found in the wisdom literature in the Bible.
- ▶ Christ obediently submitted to God's will and gave his life to save humanity from sin—sin that destroyed God's perfect intention for peace and harmony.
- ▶ It would be the creative *Wisdom* of God--Jesus Christ--who would restore God's original intention for the world.





## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ There are many alternate spiritual theories that float through our world. One new age spiritual theory today suggests that there are people from the outer planetary system who have been sent here to gift humanity with a special knowledge of the divine. We may see that belief as comical, yet there are many devotees to this aberrant way of believing and thinking. Such beliefs can be destructive and distracting. Why did Paul so vociferously fight against such theories? Why did he see them as destructive then and why are they destructive now?
- ▶ What is the ultimate beauty and power in Paul’s message?
- ▶ How can we appropriate Paul’s message in our lives today? What are the implications of what Paul is teaching the Colossians?
- ▶ How is this Good News for us today?

## Gospel: Luke 10:25-37

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

## Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ Jesus teaches the disciples what it means to be a disciple by telling them a story—a parable.
- ▶ Jesus answers the question that is the focus not only of this entire section in Luke, but also today’s first and second reading—“what must one do to be saved?”
- ▶ Disciples must put what they believe into action. Lofty thoughts are not enough.
- ▶ Every society sets boundaries. Those of higher status think they are deservedly privileged and those of lower status are deservedly poor and outcast (so thinks those of higher status). It is the only way that those of higher status feel justified in their exalted position—they deserve it, after all!
- ▶ Every society—ancient and contemporary—is guilty of such distinctions.
- ▶ Jesus challenges such thinking in today’s Gospel. He uses a parable (intended to

turn the listener's expectations upside down) to teach his followers that the "way things are" are not necessarily the "way things should be". He challenges the status quo.

- ▶ People's way of behaving and relating must be judged according to the law of love, not the laws and norms of culture.
- ▶ Jesus challenged the customary cultural boundaries of his day. He suggested that the appropriate way of relating to the "unclean" is to do what is least expected—reach out and touch them; extend God's love and compassion to them; acknowledge them as children of God.
- ▶ Jesus demonstrated that the way of discipleship is the way of upsetting proverbial apple carts—to move people out of their comfortable, status driven positions into a new way of living and being in the world.
- ▶ Today's Gospel is an illustration of what defines a "good neighbor." Jews believed that a neighbor was a believer in the God of Israel. Jesus expands the definition of neighbor.
- ▶ Luke's community struggled with the incorporation of gentiles into the Christian community. The Jewish Christians were stretched to the limits when it came to what was being asked of them. The Law was their life-blood.
- ▶ Consider for a moment: a Jewish believer was converted to Christ. He never abandoned his Jewish roots, however. He still observed the Law and attended gatherings at the local synagogue. As a Jew he would strongly avoid contact with an unclean person for such contact would require that he show himself to the Temple priest and undergo a ritual cleansing.
- ▶ Consider further. A Gentile was also converted to Christ. He was not circumcised and he did not observe dietary laws which rendered him unclean. The difficult question in that Christian community was: "How can a good Jewish Christian ever be expected to embrace the Gentile Christian and consider him a neighbor? It is a dilemma of gargantuan proportions.
- ▶ Jesus asks them to look beyond the norm and to see with God's eyes—to embrace a new way of understanding who one's neighbor truly is.
- ▶ Jesus seeks to tear down previous walls of division and he uses this parable to illustrate.
- ▶ The victim in the parable was Jewish. The fact that he had no clothes meant that his status could not be determined. A priest and a Levite (two who should have stopped) pass the poor victim right by probably out of fear of coming in contact with an unclean person.
- ▶ If the listener had been from the lower class they would have turned a knowing eyebrow at the behavior of the elite clerical class—they would have expected as much.
- ▶ If the listener was from that elite clerical class such as the Sadducees, they would have expected the passers-by to do just what they did---they would have seen nothing wrong in their behavior.
- ▶ Pharisees and regular lay folk would not have approved of the behavior, however.
- ▶ The circumstances of the story required the listener to take a position—with

whom would they identify?

- ▶ The parable then “caught” the listener simply with the arrival of the Samaritan. “Gotcha!” The Samaritan did not fit—a normal Jewish story would have included a certain order—the priest, the Levite and the regular Israelite people.
- ▶ The apple cart was now officially turned upside down. The listener would be standing at full attention!
- ▶ Tension mounts. With whom will they identify now? The hero in this story is the unclean Samaritan—an enemy! The parable now asks listeners to stretch their comfort zone. The proverbial phrase, “the goal of the Gospel is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable” is in full swing in this story. The comfortable, expected hero would have been an Israelite—to have a Samaritan, an enemy, superimposed in that role was worse than uncomfortable. How do they break through generations of hatred between Samaritans and Jews?
- ▶ Yet, the hated Samaritan goes above and beyond the call of compassion, making the moral dilemma of the Jew even worse.
- ▶ Some interpreters call this an example story—the reader is to follow the example in the story. There is, however, another perspective worth consideration.
- ▶ The Samaritans were sinners just as the Jews were sinners—neither side can boast moral superiority. Hatred was a two way street. Thus, the Samaritans were not being held up as more righteous.
- ▶ Since no one in the story represented models to emulate, perhaps the listener is to identify with the victim. The Jewish audience was asked to put themselves in the place of the victim. If you, a Jewish person, were in a similar predicament, would you really care if your enemy saved your life as long as it was saved? Would you not accept the help offered regardless of who was offering it?
- ▶ The other bottom line of the story is that Jesus was challenging all the religious hierarchical structures as arbitrary and not necessary in the new kingdom. He was calling for a new respect, dignity and equality.
- ▶ It is no wonder that religious authorities called for Jesus’ death. He was a threat to their authority and control over the people.
- ▶ Jesus was not the warrior type Messiah that Israel had been hoping for—Jesus was calling his disciples to reach out to their enemies—not destroy them.
- ▶ Jesus was making an important point in this Gospel. One’s state in life did not determine a person’s righteousness—behavior and action determines righteousness.
- ▶ Jesus forced them to define not only what is meant by *neighbor*, but also to redefine the term enemy. “Who really is one’s neighbor?” The old constructs and determinations no longer work. Everyone is equal in the kingdom of God. No one is better or more righteous than anyone else.
- ▶ Jesus’ role was to restore the peace and justice intended for all creation at the beginning of the world. Arbitrary human divisions had no place in his new world order.





## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ Imagine you are the priest or the Levite that passed the victim by and did not stop. Imagine further you are listening to Jesus' story. How would you feel? How would you feel about Jesus' point in the story? What should have been your response? What probably would have been your response and why?
- ▶ Imagine you are the victim who just experienced being ignored by the Levite and the priest. How would you feel about an enemy saving your life? Considering all your history with Samaritans, how would you have responded? What would you have learned from this event in your life?
- ▶ Can you think of situations today that could learn a great deal from this parable and our reflection on it?
- ▶ Where have Christians dropped the ball when it comes to what Jesus is teaching in this parable?
- ▶ Jesus is teaching his disciples what it means to live in his kingdom. Describe the kingdom he came to establish. How would it be different than the kingdom we have today? How would it be the same?
- ▶ If Jesus came to restore the order and harmony intended by God at the creation of the world, did he accomplish what he set out to do? What evidence is there that he did? What still needs to be done? What could you do to continue the work he began?
- ▶ Rewrite this parable in a modern setting. Put in the place of all the characters a modern-day corollary. Who would the characters be today? What did you learn from this exercise?
- ▶ In what way are you presently living according to the commands in this Gospel? If not, what can you do to more fully live today's Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Christian mission?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

### CONCLUDING PRAYER

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

## APPENDIX

#1. There are times I cannot contain the utter sense of awe over the presence of God within—the living Word of God within my spirit. There are other times when I long for the experience of that presence, but feel instead the emptiness of the dark night of the soul. Some of the great saints confessed that they did not experience God’s consolation for years on end. Yet still we are to love the Lord God with our entire being. How do we do that?

God created us with the deepest longing for intimate union with him—yet at times he withholds the experience of that presence so as to increase it in us. Trust can only grow when that for which we long can only be realized in the future. When we are given immediate access on a constant basis there is no need to trust, there is no need to long—the object of our longing is always at our fingertips. Absence increases longing.

Thus, God invites us to wait so that our faith and trust in him can grow. While we wait God invites us to nurture our covenant relationship with him. We do that by abandoning our lives to his care and by living a just life—by following his commands. We can do no less for the great love he has given us.

#2. Paul is concerned that aberrant spiritual theologies are watering down the heart of Christianity. He is right to be concerned. His concern goes to the very core of the human psyche. We are easily distracted. Human beings do not naturally choose a difficult path over an easy path. Rarely when a person is faced with two decisions—the decision whether to take the road that leads to the cross or take the road of feel good religion and prosperity theology, most would choose the latter over the former.

We needed someone to show us by example the path we should take—the path that helps us grow and become the person we are intended to become—to find the deepest meaning for our lives. Jesus taught us the way of self-sacrifice rather than self-aggrandizement.

The new age philosophies of then and now distract us from our purpose. Such philosophies lure us with spiritual, lofty and other-worldly aspects of life rather than help us face our daily lives. They propose a feel-good approach to life and they resist the call to take up one’s cross and follow Christ day after day.

Right now I am experiencing first-hand what Paul railed against. My mentally ill son is caught up with a new age theory of interplanetary divine being that he discovered on the internet. For him the philosophy is not merely a belief system—it is literally true, concrete and factual. He has conversations with the interplanetary beings. For other devotees of the philosophy it is just that—a philosophy that guides their way of living and being—it reflects their longing for the divine, even though it takes a rather bizarre path. I am not suggesting that other followers of this belief are mentally ill. However, it is a philosophy that is ripe for a mentally ill person to latch onto and take to the extreme. Even though the extreme is borne (in this case) out of insanity, there are still

lessons to be learned by observing the effects of the extreme. The extreme shows us what is possible.

I use the example of my son as an example of why Paul was so concerned with Gnosticism. It can corrupt and distract. I will go one step further and say it can even destroy one's very life!

My son recently got swept up in the euphoria of this interplanetary new age philosophy/theology. As a result he quit the only decent paying job he ever had, one that enabled him to get his life together for the first time. He quit his job and set off to find himself and to communicate with his interplanetary family-- to be about the business of communicating divine knowledge to the world. (Sound a little like Paul's gnosticism, doesn't it?) He has taken this philosophy/belief system to such an extreme and allowed it to so distract his thinking that even his prior God relationship has receded into the background. He is now traveling all over the United States (please pray for his safety), having given up the support of family and loved ones to pursue this incredibly distracting path for his life.

When one's mind is filled with untruths, half truths and distortions there is no room for the truth regardless of whether a person is sane or not sane. Paul was correct in his admonishment of the Colossians.

Part of the lure of ancient gnosticism and some contemporary new age thinking is that it is also a retreat from everyday life. If all one has to do is meditate all day on the divine and not worry about care of one's self, it is far preferable to the daily drudgery of manual labor or engaging the world the way it needs to be engaged. The way of the cross is difficult, yes, but through its inherent pain and joy life is given tremendous insight and meaning.

#3. One morning a man came into our sanctuary at the early Sunday morning Mass. He was obviously homeless, sobbing wet, and a mess. He moved to the cross and started to sob. His entire life of brokenness lay bare before us. As much as we all attest to our care for the poor and homeless, we are nevertheless victims of our culture and the culture's subliminal and not-so subliminal stereotypes of such people. Not one person moved to help this man. As quickly as he walked into our church he walked out again.

We later reflected on what we experienced. Everyone was waiting for the next person to move and act. Everyone said they wanted to move but were frozen in time. I have often wondered what it would take for us to invite such a person to a place of honor at our table. I dare say few would. There are many heroes that would, but many of us would not.

I think the greatest challenge of this Gospel is to see ourselves as lowly as the person on the street—to see ourselves as the victim in this parable—to truly believe the equality of each person and to redefine what we mean by the word neighbor and by the word

enemy. How would we feel today if an illegal alien was the one stooping to help us? It is one thing to profess belief in such equality; it is another thing to live it.

Someone who worked with poor homeless people said that regular folks have a big problem when a homeless person does not show the requisite appreciation for help rendered. He reminded us that if a rich man is cantankerous, he is simply an eccentric, cranky rich man and we put up with him. If a poor man is cantankerous, we expel him as unworthy and unappreciative and treat him as we would treat one of the dogs on the street.

Our society's subliminal belief systems are so ingrained in us that it takes huge effort to change them. I have a person who lives under my roof that has been treated just like the man who entered our church that Sunday morning; yet still I forget what Jesus taught us about the equality of all God's people. It is a lesson that must be learned over and over again and then relearned again. Thank God for parables; they stay with us longer than directives and moral laws.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Morality  
Moral Decision Making  
Prayer  
Catholic Social Teaching

Kingdom of God  
Jesus Christ  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## MORALITY

Today's liturgy focuses on the Law and on discipleship—what it means to live as a disciple. It is a most appropriate time to consider what the Church means when it speaks of morality—that is refers to a just way of living and being in the world. Thus, today the focus of our extended session will be MORALITY.

## MORAL DECISION MAKING

Today's liturgy focuses on the Law and on discipleship. In order to establish the reign of God and live according to the moral imperatives of the Gospel, we must learn what it means to make a moral decision—that it is based on the teaching of Christ and the Scriptures. Thus, today would be a most appropriate time to focus our attention in the extended session on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

## PRAYER

Jesus established his kingdom—a new way of living and being in the world. If we are to remain faithful to his teaching we must foster our intimate relationship with him. The only way this is accomplished is through prayer. Thus the focus of our extended session today will be PRAYER.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is a wonderful springboard for reflecting on Catholic Social Teaching. It is certainly an example of the law of love which is expressed in every reading in today's liturgy. Thus, the focus of our extended doctrinal session will be CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.



## **KINGDOM OF GOD**

Jesus came to establish the kingdom. Today he tells his disciples what it means to be a disciple in that kingdom. He upsets apple carts and conventional ideas of how the world should be and invites new way of living and being in the world. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the KINGDOM OF GOD.

## **JESUS CHRIST**

The focus of this evangelistic effort is Jesus Christ and his mission to the world. Each Sunday would be an appropriate time to reflect on Jesus the Christ. Thus, today our extended session will be on JESUS CHRIST.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.